

Accelerating progress towards gender equality and biodiversity objectives



Addressing pervasive gender inequalities related to the use and conservation of biodiversity



Pervasive gender inequalities limit women's rights, opportunities, and benefits linked to biodiversity.



As a result, women are affected differently than men by biodiversity degradation and loss, and have unequal capacities to contribute to biodiversity conservation.



Gender inequalities are exacerbated by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against women on the basis of age, marital status, indigeneity, ethnicity or caste, disability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and more.



These, in turn, influence their needs, priorities, roles, responsibilities and decision-making power with respect to the use, management, and conservation of biodiversity.

Redressing gender inequalities across several areas of biodiversity management and conservation can enhance equality and accelerate progress towards:

- Conservation of biological diversity
- Sustainable use of the components of biological diversity
- Fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources



Improve gender-equitable ownership, access to, use and control of land and other resources

Women's and men's access to, ownership and control of land and other resources are typically differentiated due to socially constructed gender norms. Unequal access to resources and assets prevents rural women from adopting new technologies as readily as rural men. For instance, women farmers are less likely than men to purchase inputs, such as improved seeds, and to use mechanical tools, in part due to lack of access to credit and extension services.



These gender differences also translate into different kinds of pressures on natural habitats. For example, women farming already marginal lands with poor quality inputs may have limited capacity to carry out sustainable agricultural practices, even if they understand the benefits.

In the dryland regions of Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal and India, where women have more limited access to and control over land than men, insecure land tenure is a disincentive to maintain soil quality and invest in land rehabilitation. It also limits women's access to credit, institutions and extension services that would support combating desertification¹.

Redressing inequalities in access and control over resources not only enables women to participate in restoration and conservation efforts, but also enhances biodiversity conservation.



Recognize women's roles and responsibilities

Gender norms often differentiate the roles and responsibilities of women and men, girls and boys. Women and girls are critical to the agricultural labor force globally, and conduct most unpaid domestic labor, including caring for household members, tending to livestock, collecting water and fuelwood, and gathering and processing a diversity of wild plants for nutritive and medicinal purposes. Yet, their labor and contributions to biodiversity management often remain invisible and poorly valued.

For example, 70% of cotton planters and 90% of cotton harvesters in India are women². Yet, their contributions are seldom acknowledged; they rarely own the land they work on, are paid less than men, are excluded from training and they are also less involved in decision-making.



Recognizing women's roles and knowledge, and legitimacy as stakeholders in the sustainable management and conservation of biodiversity, should endow them with a seat at the table when it comes to decision-making. Yet, due to discriminatory norms, stereotypes and institutions, women and marginalized groups are often excluded from decision-making on biodiversity in the private and public spheres, at multiple scales. Women are also overlooked in biodiversity policy and programs or identified as a vulnerable group rather than as agents of change. Their lack of voice and influence in this sphere further affects the benefits they receive from conservation initiatives.

Although gender-disaggregated data is lacking and often unreliable, available data suggests that women constitute > 40% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries, 47% of the total global fisheries workforce and almost 25% of workers in the forestry sector globally².



Recognizing women as legitimate actors and agents in biodiversity management and conservation can enhance understanding of, and enhance women's claims in, these processes.



Draw upon gender-specific knowledge of biodiversity

The gender division of labor results in men and women having differentiated, specialized knowledge of biodiversity. Knowledge of biodiversity also differs by age, culture and other factors of social differentiation. Yet, women are often overlooked as valuable knowledge holders and skilled managers of biodiversity and ecosystems.



In the Philippines, women typically have specialized knowledge of intertidal and near-shore fish and crustacean species, which are harvested mainly for subsistence purposes. Conversely, men know more about fish in offshore coral reefs that have greater commercial value. This is not just the case in the Philippines, but in other coastal countries too⁴.

Drawing on the knowledge of all genders provides a more holistic understanding of biodiversity – its uses, threats, and management strategies – that can contribute to more effective management and conservation strategies.

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Identify gender-specific values and priorities related to biological resources

Due to their gender roles, women and men typically have different interactions with and requirements for biological resources. These influence their priorities when it comes to which species and varieties to grow and preserve, where, and how. Yet, these gender-based differences are often overlooked.

Addressing gender-specific priorities is important for sustainably managing and conserving the natural resources valued by diverse gender groups.



*In Burkina Faso, women value shea trees (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) for their culinary and medicinal uses whereas men prefer tree species that provide shade and improve soil fertility. These preferences influence which species are selected for protection, planting and cultivation as well as subsequent access to tree commodities⁵.*



Enhance the full, effective and equitable participation of all genders in biodiversity management and conservation

Women and men are equally important stakeholders to engage in biodiversity conservation planning and decision-making, particularly as they often have different knowledge, experiences, needs and priorities related to biodiversity. For instance, local women in Brazil were found to be significantly more proficient than men in identifying, naming and describing the medicinal value of plant species, notably due to their roles as primary healthcare givers⁶. Women's participation in the management and conservation of biodiversity has been linked to improved resource management and conservation outcomes.

Yet, in many contexts women's participation in several types of decision-making lags behind men's. For example, programs and activities pertaining to land management may exclude women, who have limited formal ownership and control over land in many countries. Social norms that limit women's capacity to engage meaningfully and effectively in decision-making on biodiversity exist across scales, from the household to the community, national and international arenas.

Women's equal, full, and effective participation, leadership, and agency to make decisions related to biodiversity at all scales supports effective and equitable biodiversity management processes.



Data from > 8,000 households across Africa, Asia and Latin America indicates that women's participation in forest user groups was far less than men's, and below their proportionate use of forests⁷. Furthermore, women hold only 15% of top ministerial positions in environment-related sectors worldwide⁸.



Promote the equitable distribution of costs and benefits from biodiversity

Rights to the benefits, whether in kind (e.g. direct use and/or consumption of biological resources, trainings, etc.) or in cash, from biodiversity and related initiatives are often unequally distributed across gender groups. Likewise, the costs involved in biodiversity conservation – be they labor, monetary, or opportunity costs of foregone use – are often disproportionately borne by particular gender groups. **Redressing inequalities in the distribution of resources, as well as in the costs and benefits from biodiversity management, can create more inclusive spaces and promote more effective participation in biodiversity conservation efforts by all.**



Address gendered risks and vulnerabilities

Risks and vulnerabilities to the loss of biodiversity and ecosystems, or in regard to initiatives to combat this loss, are different for women and men due to the above-mentioned gender inequalities. In many contexts, women are more vulnerable to these processes (such as food insecurity when biological resources disappear) than men. **Addressing gender-specific vulnerabilities and establishing safeguards to protect women's rights, claims, and decision-making over biological resources also contributes to safeguarding these resources.**

Creating an enabling environment for equitable biodiversity management and conservation



Collect sex-disaggregated data and evidence on gender and biodiversity

Robust data at a global scale is lacking on women and biodiversity across the areas of concern described above. Limited data can contribute to an inaccurate understanding of human pressures on ecosystems, their gender dimensions, and implications for natural resource management. For instance, national forest assessments do not necessarily reflect women's informal use of forest products, yet such data is essential to understand the full range of stakeholder interests in biodiversity and the real value of ecosystem services. Similarly, women's informal roles in fisheries (and many other sectors) means that they are often not included in formal user organizations and statistics. In the Philippines, for example, this led to the perpetuation of gender inequalities when development finance was channeled into formal fisheries organizations, and women were systematically denied access to decision-making about coastal resources^{9 10}.

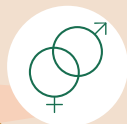
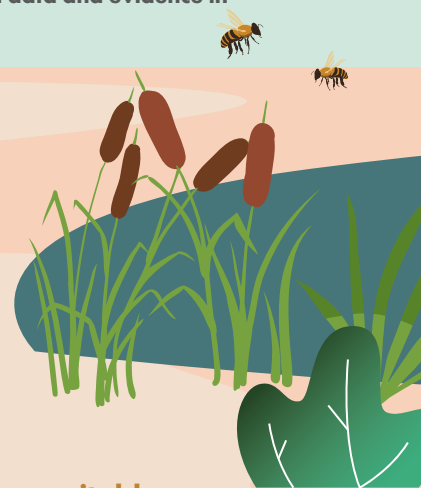
Ensuring that biodiversity research integrates gender as a key analytical lens can help provide a comprehensive and holistic view of biodiversity-related knowledge. Where sex-disaggregated data is missing in official statistics, programs and projects can contribute to collecting it and therefore help to make "visible" the roles of women and men. Qualitative data, which can be obtained using methods such as focus group discussions, is also important to highlight issues that may not be captured in official statistics.

Collecting sex-disaggregated data and evidence on gendered biodiversity use and management for planning, monitoring and reporting helps to track progress in gender equality in this area. The capacity of governments and other actors to collect, analyze and apply sex-disaggregated data and evidence in relation to biodiversity needs to be improved.



Support gender-equitable policy engagement and leadership

Participation in decision-making processes affecting one's life is important in itself, as a fundamental right. Across fields, there is also evidence that diversity in decision-making leads to improved outcomes. In this regard, **providing an enabling environment for women to contribute to biodiversity policies, programs, and agenda-setting can contribute to improved biodiversity conservation efforts.** This requires changes in formal and informal institutions, for example, by promoting gender parity in delegations (e.g., to the Convention on Biological Diversity meetings) and national decision-making positions; and by challenging norms that discriminate against women's equitable participation, voice and influence in decision-making at multiple scales. Supporting gender-equitable policy engagement and leadership also means ensuring that women are well prepared to engage in these processes, for example, with relevant information, formal education and training.



Create and uphold gender-equitable policies, institutions and access to finance

Women are often overlooked in biodiversity policies and programs, or depicted solely as a vulnerable group rather than as agents of change. Moreover, policies, programs and related initiatives may not fully account for differences in how women and men use and contribute to the management of biological resources. Inequalities in all of the above mentioned areas, which have important policy and programmatic implications, are often overlooked.

The enabling environment must be enhanced so that policies and investments in conservation and sustainable management advance the rights and respond to the priorities, capacities, and constraints of all genders. This includes facilitating access to finance for grassroots women's organizations, Indigenous peoples and local communities for sustainable biodiversity management and conservation.

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